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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [MARR](#) [PINS](#) [ZJ](#) [ZK](#) [AJ](#) [GG](#) [TI](#) [RS](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: LOOKING EAST: TURKEY'S MILITARY INVESTS IN THE
CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

REF: A. ANKARA 0489
[1](#)B. ANKARA 0779

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Classified By: Pol Mil Counselor Carl Siebentritt for
reasons 1.4 (b/d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Turkey has invested heavily in its security relationships in the Caucasus and Central Asia, with the bulk of its military assistance going to Azerbaijan. Turkey provides security assistance funds and training to all the countries in the region except Armenia and Uzbekistan. Historical and cultural ties, expanding commercial interests, strategic competition with Russia and Iran, and disenchantment with Euro-Atlantic relations are the traditional drivers of Turkey's interest in the east. Increasingly, however, military officials justify intensified security ties by citing threats to energy security from perceived Russian conniving with Armenia and Iran to "breach" U.S.-supported east-west routes for Caspian energy. Turkish officials tell us they would welcome closer collaboration with the U.S. in this region, but intend to move slowly to avoid irritating Russia. End Summary.

Turkey-Azerbaijan: "One Nation but Two States"

[1](#)2. (C) Turkey's military relations with Azerbaijan, which Turkey perceives as its strategic bridge to Central Asia, are the strongest in the region and the most extensive with any

country except the U.S. With close ethnic and cultural ties, Turkey and Azerbaijan are "one nation, but two states," according to one Turkish general. The Turkish General Staff tells us Turkey has provided approximately USD 600 million in military assistance to Azerbaijan since 1998, focused on training, improving force readiness, and adapting Azeri equipment and doctrine to NATO standards. Azerbaijan benefits particularly from the Partnership for Peace (PFP) program, according to Turkish observers, who claim that military training has boosted the confidence of Azeri military forces. The Turkish military mission in Azerbaijan currently includes 46 instructors and staff at the Turkish designed and built military academy. Meanwhile, over 200 Azeri officers and cadets have been trained in Turkey, including at Turkey's PFP Center.

13. (C) Turkey and Azerbaijan announced a joint high level commission to coordinate military cooperation and mutual security assistance in February 2007 during a visit to Baku by Deputy Chief of the Turkish General Staff (DCHOD) GEN Ergin Saygun. TGS officials say the commission, chaired by Saygun and Azerbaijani Defense Minister Safar Aliyev, will have logistics, political-military, and defense industry components. Prior to Saygun's visit to Baku, Aliyev met with Chief of the Turkish General Staff (CHOD) GEN Yasar Buyukanit on February 5 in Ankara to discuss military cooperation. We understand that a three-star billet has been created for a Turkish general to become a senior advisor to Aliyev.

14. (C) The TGS has flagged the strategic importance to Turkey of the east-west energy corridor from Azerbaijan, comprised of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, which became operational in May 2006, and a parallel new line that is expected to pump Azeri gas to the Turkish grid at the eastern Turkish city of Erzurum later this year. A new rail line has

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also been undertaken which will -- when complete -- link Baku to the Turkish rail network at Kars (and completely bypass Armenia). The TGS is very concerned that Russia is conniving with Armenia and Iran to breach this east-west energy corridor by pushing north-south alternatives (ref a), including a Russia-Armenia-Iran pipeline and construction of a refinery in Armenia near the Iranian border.

Isolating Armenia

15. (C) Accelerated Turkish military ties with Azerbaijan are also intended to isolate Armenia. The Turkish-Armenian border has been closed since the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the countries have no bilateral security cooperation. Military officials note that Armenian officers have been invited to training at Turkey's Partnership for Peace Center and a senior Armenian officer attended the Silk Road flag officer seminar hosted by Turkey. However, Armenia has never reciprocated, they complain, and has used NATO and PFP fora to push the for recognition of an Armenian genocide. Turkish officers cite Armenia's close relations with Russia as a major impediment to Turkish plans for greater engagement with Central Asia (ref b).

Keeping the Georgians in Line

16. (C) While Turkey has sought closer relations with Georgia, including military ties, it views Tbilisi's recent stance toward Russia as unnecessarily and dangerously provocative, and has urged Georgia to be more cautious. Turkish officials have told us they support Georgia's NATO ambitions but are not quite as optimistic as the U.S. that a Membership Action Plan will temper Tbilisi's rhetoric towards Russia. An MFA official told us that Turkey's security assistance to Georgia is calibrated by Ankara's concerns for what it considers

"inexperienced and reckless leadership" vis-a-vis Russia.

¶7. (C) Turkish observers view Georgia's political environment as the most fragile in the Caucasus. Nevertheless, the TGS reports that Turkey has provided Georgia with over USD 70 million in bilateral military aid in recent years and has trained 65 Georgian military personnel in Turkey, including border guards, making Tbilisi the second largest recipient of Turkish security assistance in the region after Azerbaijan. Most of Turkey's aid to Georgia has focused on training, including the establishment of a modern military academy with some Turkish faculty and staff.

Assistance to Central Asia

¶8. (C) As in the Caucasus, Turkey's military aid to Central Asia has focused on training from the outset. The five post-Soviet Central Asian republics had a pressing need for military training, ASAM Central Asia analyst Gokcen Ogan told us, because the large number of mid-level military officers and NCOs in those countries who chose to remain in the Russian armed services created a void of trained middle managers and action officers. And as with Azerbaijan, Turkish ethnic affinity with the Central Asians has provided an important psychological and strategic rationale for Turkey's security relations in the region.

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¶9. (C) Of the five Central Asian republics, Turkmenistan has received the most military assistance from Turkey, valued at USD 30 million in recent years for logistics support and training, according to the TGS. Turkey has trained 170 Turkmen officers. Officials tell us Turkey hopes to expand its overall relationship with Turkmenistan and is seeking to exploit the political opening created by the succession of President Berdimuhamedov (reftel). As with Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan's hydrocarbon resources are a critical factor driving Turkey's interest.

¶10. (C) Other Central Asian countries receiving Turkish military assistance according to the TGS are: Kazakhstan (USD 20 million), Kyrgyzstan (USD 16 million), and Tajikistan (USD 11 million).

¶11. (C) Uzbekistan is perhaps the most strategically important Central Asian country for Turkey, according to ASAM's Ogan, but has been the most problematic for the last ten years. Although Turkey had provided over USD 6 million in military assistance in the early 1990s, according to the TGS, President Karimov cut off Turkish military and other assistance after Turkey was charged with supporting his political opposition beginning in 1996. Turkish training, educational exchanges, and much investment have been halted. According to Ogan, the bilateral discord continues, with further suspicion in Tashkent about illicit Turkish aid to the opposition in Uzbekistan's 2007 elections. Uzbekistan remains Turkey's weakest military link in Central Asia.

Comment

¶12. (C) While Turkey's earlier and less than successful forays into Central Asia in the 1990's were based on hopes of a post-Cold War re-birth of Turkish culture and Turkic consciousness in the region, today's push for security ties focuses more on gas and oil, and Turkey's ambition to be the region's energy hub. The Turkish military in particular shares our concern over Russian attempts to monopolize Caspian energy sources and transport, seeing Armenia and Iran as Russia's allies in this effort. In that regard, the TGS regards the millions Turkey spends on security assistance in the region to be well worth the influence it buys. Turkish

officials tell us they would welcome closer consultation with us on security issues in the region, but add that Turkey will proceed cautiously to avoid provoking Russia.

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